

**VEGAN FROM THE INSIDE:  
WHY PEOPLE LOVE PLANT-BASED DIETS**



**JANICE STANGER, Ph.D.**

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Vegan From the Inside: Why People Love Plant-Based Diets

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Plant-based eating choices are becoming increasingly popular and mainstream. Bill Clinton, Steve Wynn, and John Mackey have publically touted the weight loss and health improvements they realized after going on a 100% plant-based (vegan) diet. Oprah has flirted with an animal-free food plan, and restaurants and supermarkets routinely offer plant-based choices.

A 2011 survey, *Vegan From the Inside*, shatters six common myths that may prevent more people from enjoying the benefits of a plant-based diet. 2,068 vegans from the United States and around the world candidly shared the joys, rewards, and challenges of their lifestyle. Here's the accurate information vs. fallacy on this blossoming food trend.

**MYTH ONE.** Vegans are pale, weak, and unhealthy because their diet lacks protein and other vital nutrients.

#### FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- 68.6% of respondents noted they got healthier after starting a 100% plant-based diet, yet only 1.6% said their health declined. Most of the other respondents had excellent health before beginning a plant-based eating plan, and answered that their health continued at that same desirable level.
- 64.3% rate improving or maintaining health as a very important reason to remain vegan.
- 55.2% said their energy level increased after going animal-free, as opposed to only 2.2% who said their energy level decreased.
- 44.2% enjoyed increased physical activity after adopting a vegan diet.

How could a diet deficient in protein and other important nutrients fuel such enhanced health, activity, and energy levels? Objective nutrition research supports these survey findings. A whole foods, plant-based diet will provide the optimal amount of protein and just about any other nutrient. Vegans have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, and a whole foods, plant-based diet may reverse diabetes and other chronic illness. Survey respondents choose a variety of vegan diets, not just those based on the whole foods ideal, yet still obtained these impressive results.

#### IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes ten years ago - but 2 years ago (after 2 years of being vegan), my specialist told me he could no longer justify seeing me as a diabetic patient. In effect, I am cured."*

*"As an avid runner, two months after adopting a vegan diet I no longer experienced joint/knee/hip pain. Since I'd been a vegetarian for years, the only difference was the absence of dairy in my diet. I haven't required a cortisone injection since going vegan."*

*"I had breast cancer and consider this survival. But I have been AMAZED at how much better I feel."*

*"I also haven't aged as rapidly as my peers - which in turn causes them to think 'maybe if I go vegan...I may look younger as well'."*

*"I have rheumatoid arthritis, after six months of changing to a purely vegan diet, my doctor states I am in remission, which he says never happens."*

*"I've been very pleased with my lowered blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels."*

*"Since becoming vegan, I've had a great improvement in health: most notably my severe hypothyroidism turned around without medication. Symptoms of adrenal fatigue, pre-diabetes, hypoglycemia, chronic fatigue syndrome, polycystic ovarian syndrome, chronic cystic acne, overweight, sluggish digestion, and depression all disappeared within months of switching to a vegan diet. My doctors are still shocked!"*

*"When I gave up dairy products, I was finally able to "cure" my chronic sinusitis. After 6 sinus surgeries, I was amazed that the solution was so easy."*

*"My energy and intensity of workouts has increased since becoming vegan."*

*"Started diet to benefit my ultramarathon racing. Many ultra runners are vegan."*

**MYTH TWO.** A vegan diet has too many "carbs" to be effective for weight loss.

FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- 42.1% of respondents lost weight they wanted to lose after going plant-based. Another 36.3% started at their ideal weight – and stayed there. Only 5.3% stated they gained weight after starting a vegan diet.
- 73.4% enjoy cooking more since going animal-free. This is important for weight loss because dieters generally have better control over food ingredients and the amount they eat when they cook themselves.

Weight loss research shows the accuracy of these survey findings. Study after study reports that those on plant-based diets are, on average, leaner than people who eat meat, and also have an easier time keeping weight off.

IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"I have lost 50 pounds this year on a vegan diet and reversed a diabetic diagnosis. I plan to get down to my college weight of 103 pounds and now see it as a possibility. I remember sitting in a doctor's office years ago where I was told that I would never get down to 105 ever again; that I was too old. The vegan diet has given me renewed hope and vigor to lead the kind of life I felt I had left behind."*

*"I have been vegan for 2 years now and have lost over 100 lbs. I am a role model to others who struggle with weight loss and do my best to motivate them."*

*"Lost 15 pounds effortlessly at the beginning and maintain a balanced diet, mostly of whole foods."*

*"My life has changed 1000% for the better. I'd been struggling with being overweight for years and lost 33 pounds & have maintained for 3 months."*

**MYTH THREE.** A vegan diet is boring.

FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- 96.7% of respondents enjoy the food they eat on a vegan diet.
- 94.4% intend to stay on a 100% plant-based diet for the rest of their life.

People seldom voluntarily remain with a choice they find boring. A [Vegetarian Resource Group \(VRG\) survey](#) reinforces these findings. VRG surveyed people in 2009 who had been vegetarian or vegan in 2006. Over those three years, every single one of the male vegans remained vegan, while 83% of the female vegans still chose a 100% plant-based diet.

#### IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"Going vegan has been a wonderful experience. I've learned about all sorts of amazing foods and my palette has expanded greatly."*

*"You learn about tons of new foods and ways to cook!"*

*"Every myth I've heard about a vegan diet has been debunked over time, especially the myth that it is not an interesting, sustaining, or varied diet. I have never eaten so well or enjoyed eating so much in my life as I do now."*

**MYTH FOUR.** A vegan diet is all about deprivation and lower quality of life.

#### FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- Again, just about every respondent enjoyed their food and virtually all intend to stay on their eating plan forever.
- Plant-based eaters indicated other rewards of their diet, including enjoying cooking more (73.4%), making a difference for animals (90.8%) and the environment (86.3%), feeling closer to animals and nature (70.5%), helping others by being a good role model (69.6%), and feeling more spiritual (41.6%).

Having chronic conditions and low energy from a poor diet leads to deprivation, while being in vibrant, vigorous health is all about enjoying life to the max. Moving toward a purpose is one of life's most fulfilling experiences.

#### IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"In all I have made new friends, cook more foods, am more aware of the provenance and nutrition of what I eat, and feel like I can be a good ambassador for veganism."*

*"The food is great - I'm eating a much more diverse diet than I did as a meat-eater and even as a vegetarian..I've never enjoyed cooking and baking so much."*

*"I absolutely love being vegan. Always said I couldn't do it because of a love for cheese, and now I can't imagine eating cheese. It seems so heavy and clogging...like it's just permanently with you. I feel amazing now!"*

*"The cravings I used to have for cheese or meat have totally disappeared and I no longer want their fake substitutes, either. It sometimes feels like my body is sighing and saying thanks for not making it deal with that weird stuff anymore!"*

*"Going vegan has been the most soul satisfying experience of my life. I feel so inter-connected to human and non-human animals. Being vegan feels so natural to me now that it's hard to believe I wasn't vegan at one time."*

**MYTH FIVE.** A vegan diet requires a high level of discipline and is difficult to stick to in the long-run.

FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- According to 64.5% of respondents, transitioning to a plant-based diet required some effort. 10.3% said it took a lot of effort, while 24.9% noted the transition was effortless for them.
- Over time, not much discipline is required to remain vegan; 61.2% observe staying on a vegan diet on an ongoing basis is effortless. Only 3.2% say it takes a lot of effort.
- The percentage who find staying vegan effortless rises the longer people stay on a plant-based diet.

If a vegan diet were really so much work, then would 94.4% intend to stay on it for the rest of their life?

IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"Becoming (and staying) vegan is SO much easier than people assume. The food is fantastic, and becoming more and more convenient all the time."*

*"The only regret i have since becoming vegan is that I didn't do it sooner. I love it and it is easier than I thought it would be."*

*"After over 11 years, I look back at my decision to become vegan as one of the best things I've ever done in my life. It is not a lifestyle of restriction, rather it opens up new worlds to explore; things that I would've been closed-minded to before going vegan. As a result I have been exposed to so many new things, ideas, foods, etc. that I would not have been exposed to before, and I am that much better off for it. Contrary to what so many non-vegans might think, vegans are some of the most food-oriented people you'll ever meet. I love to eat new foods and am passionate about sharing good food with others. I was becoming bored with food before I went vegan and the change opened up so many new options that I would've never considered."*

**MYTH SIX.** Vegans can't enjoy eating out or other social get-togethers.

FACTS FROM THE SURVEY.

- While 60.2% indicate eating out is less convenient, many respondents wrote in the strategies they have developed to overcome this.
- The most common reaction that vegans see when someone learns they are animal-free is curiosity, followed by surprise and willingness to accommodate. These responses can build social bonds.

In response to open-ended questions, people provided more information on these challenges on a vegan diet. One is simply the convenience factor, while the other is dealing with erroneous perceptions from others.

Most comments viewed the convenience factor as more of an annoyance that is not especially bothersome. Figuring out how to respond to people who are confused, irritated, or not accepting of their dietary choices is more troubling.

Some respondents stated they did not want to cause more work for others and did not need any special accommodations. Others found that people's reactions varied by location, age, and relationship. No one considered changing their diet because of this one issue, which some noted is getting easier all the time as people learn about the benefits of plant-based eating.

While some people may be unaccepting of a plant-based diet, this is not the most frequent reaction. Vegans employ a wide range of game plans to positively work with the feelings of others.

#### IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"Sometimes it is hard to find food to eat, but generally, even when traveling, I can find a delicious, healthy meal."*

*"Eating out is difficult sometimes as I don't live in a very vegan-friendly community. However, these inconveniences are small and are totally worth it to be able to live a cruelty-free life."*

*"I love being a vegan, but it is definitely a social challenge... Also, it is very hard for me to watch the people I care about eat non-vegan diets - I know that it is so very unhealthy for them."*

*"Traveling and eating out can be somewhat socially challenging. I often end up places where I can't eat anything, and have to bring my own food or eat at a different time. It sucks, but I end up saving money and eating healthier foods. Aside from the social inconvenience, being vegan is pretty straightforward. It can be very frustrating to explain that I am healthy just eating plants."*

*"Personally, the most difficult part about being vegan is when I am a guest for meals at another's home. I worry about inconveniencing others with my special dietary restrictions."*

*"People are incredibly interested to know what I can or cannot eat. They often think it's ridiculous that I don't eat meat or dairy, etc. However, after trying some of my creations (especially my vegan chocolate cake) they find that vegan food is not bland which seems to be the most common misconception I've encountered."*

*"General public is more understanding and wanting information."*

#### **CONCLUSION: VEGANS ARE HAPPY, HEALTHY, ENERGETIC, AND WANT TO STAY 100% PLANT-BASED**

Dr. Pam Popper, Executive Director of the Wellness Forum, observes the significance of survey findings: "Finally, some documentation showing what those of us who have been teaching people to adopt a plant-based diet for years have known all along. The diet is easy, people love it, they get great results, and they generally stick with it."

#### IN RESPONDENTS' OWN WORDS

*"Going vegan was the best thing I ever did!"*

*"Becoming vegan is the single most important choice I've made for my health and well-being as well as for animals and the planet."*

*"I only wish that I had discovered the benefits of a vegan lifestyle sooner."*

*"I feel that I'm doing the right thing for the animals and the environment and I get the added perk of a healthier body. I'm very happy that I'm vegan and would never go back to eating animals."*

*"Being vegan is an incredibly joyful thing to me. It would be impossible now for me to be any other way. I don't find it hard to do at all."*

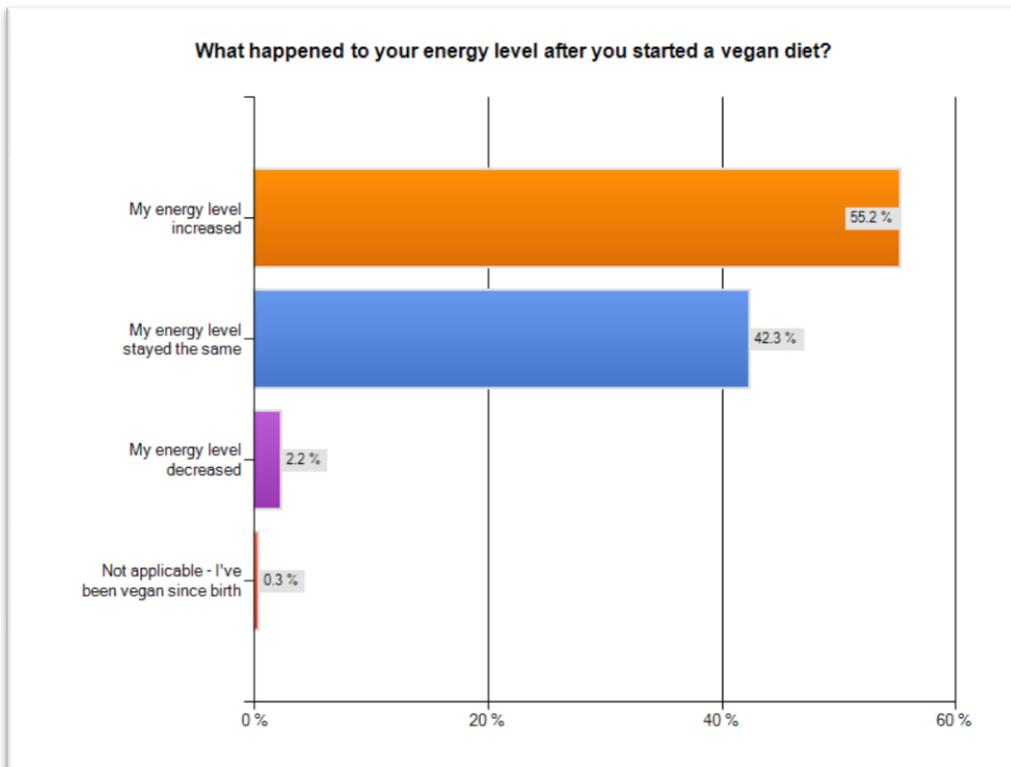
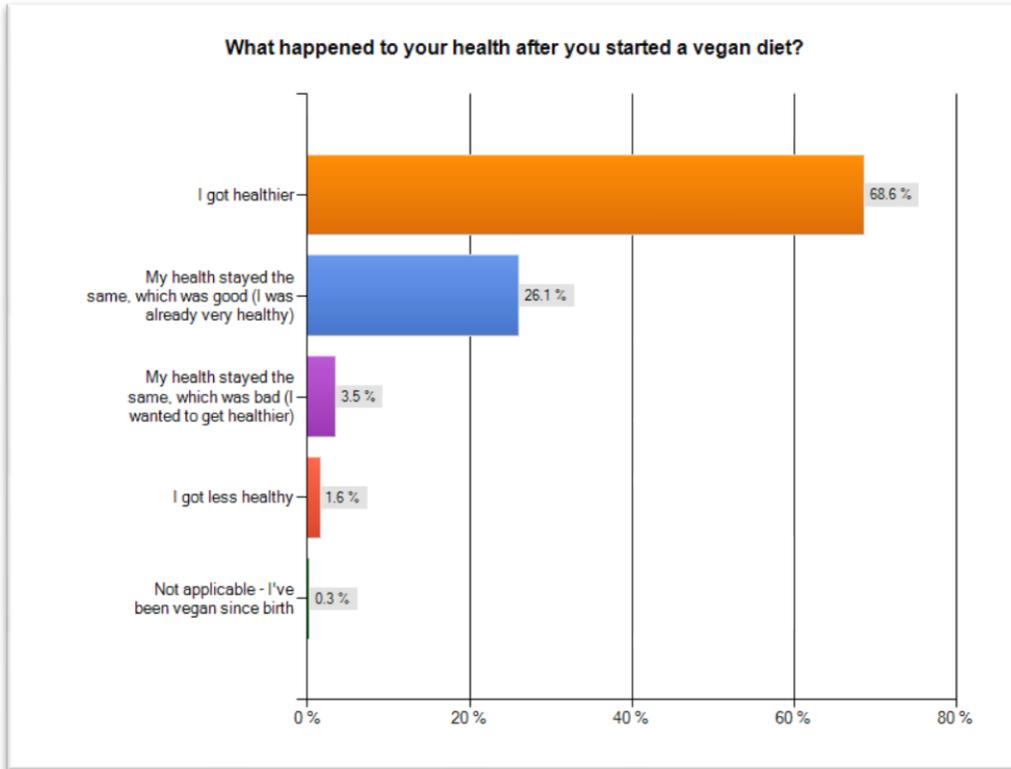
*"My health has improved since making the full whole food, plant-based (vegan) diet. I have no intention of ever going back the other way and only intend to continue to make my vegan diet the most optimal diet for me."*



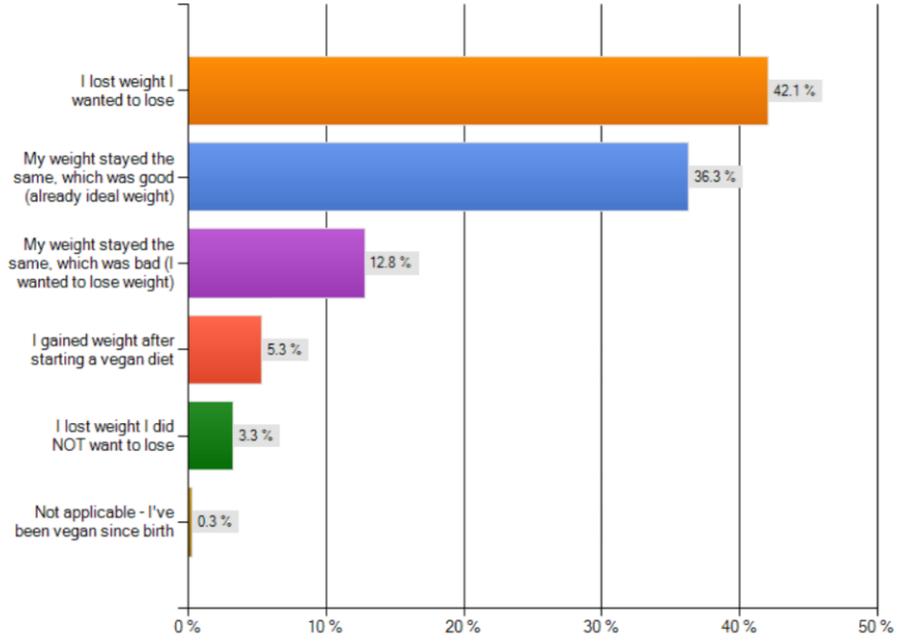
Millions understand that choosing a plant-based diet will likely prevent common chronic illnesses, including diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, stroke, arthritis, autoimmune disorders, and even cancer. These conditions can often be reversed with an animal-free diet.

Pet-lovers may be uncomfortable with – even disgusted by – the unending undercover footage showing farmed animals living in cages too small to even turn around. These videos and photos shock with scenes of deliberate abuse as helpless animals are kicked, beaten, cut, and dragged on factory farms or linger in pain at slaughterhouses. People wanting a greener lifestyle may have read how animal foods contribute to pollution, wasted resources, and deforestation. The Vegan from the Inside survey provides state-of-the-art information people need to feel comfortable trying out a plant-based diet, whatever the reason is for their interest.

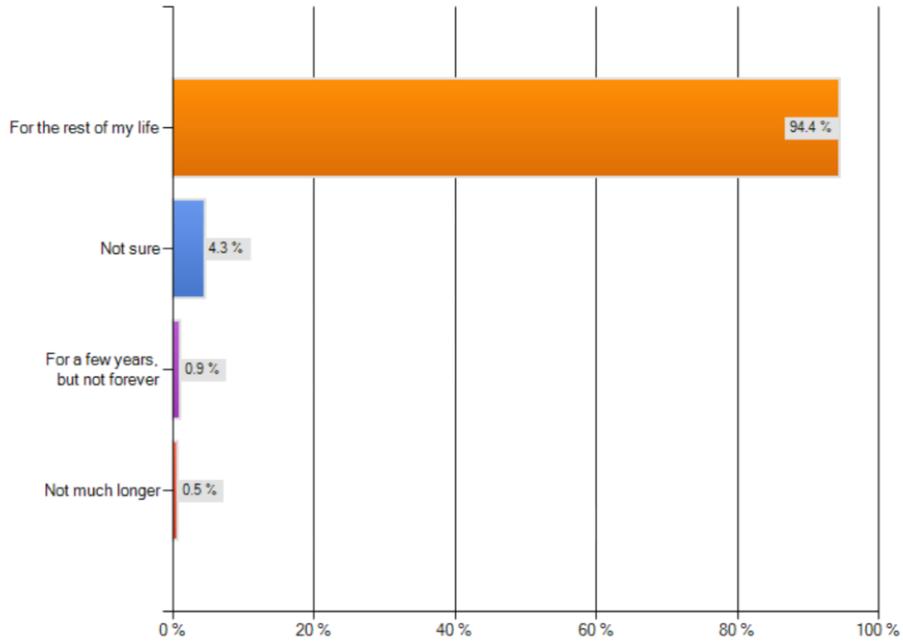
## SURVEY RESPONSES



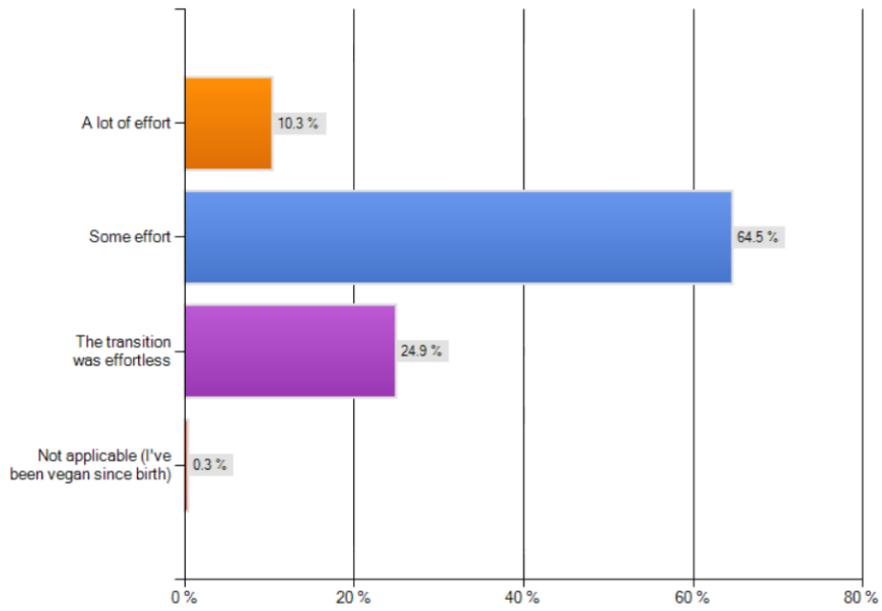
### What happened to your weight after you started a vegan diet?



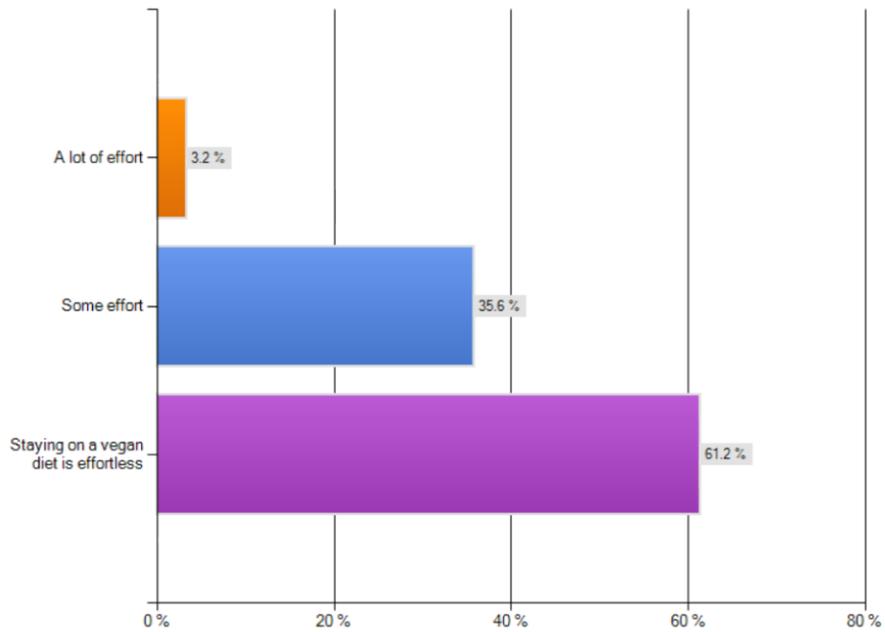
### How long do you intend to stay on a vegan diet?

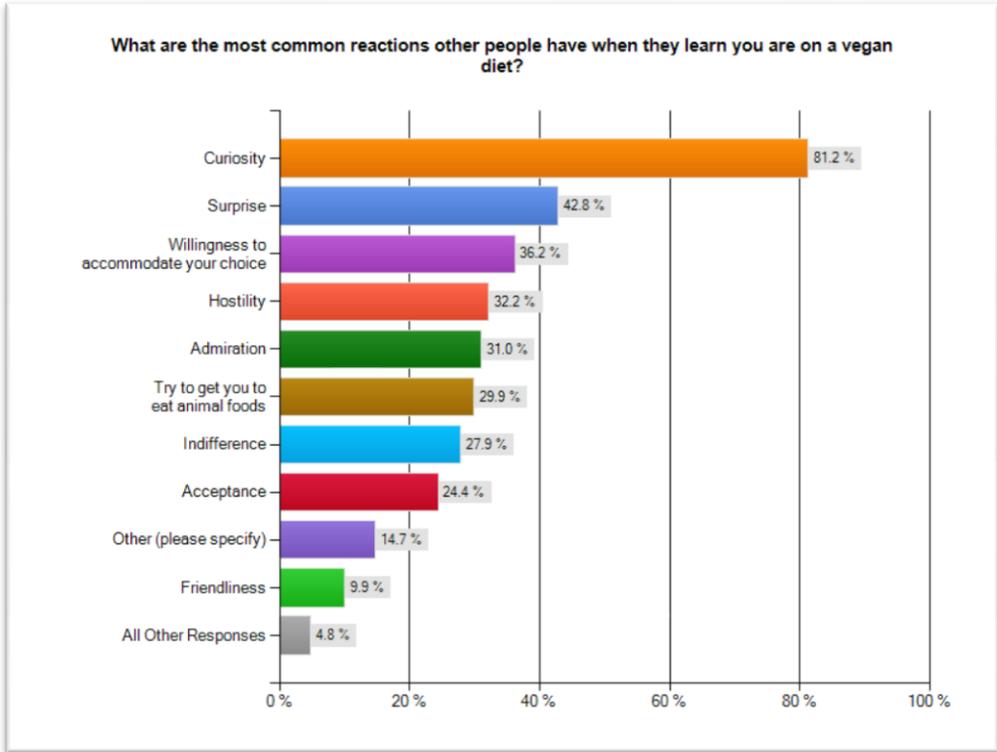
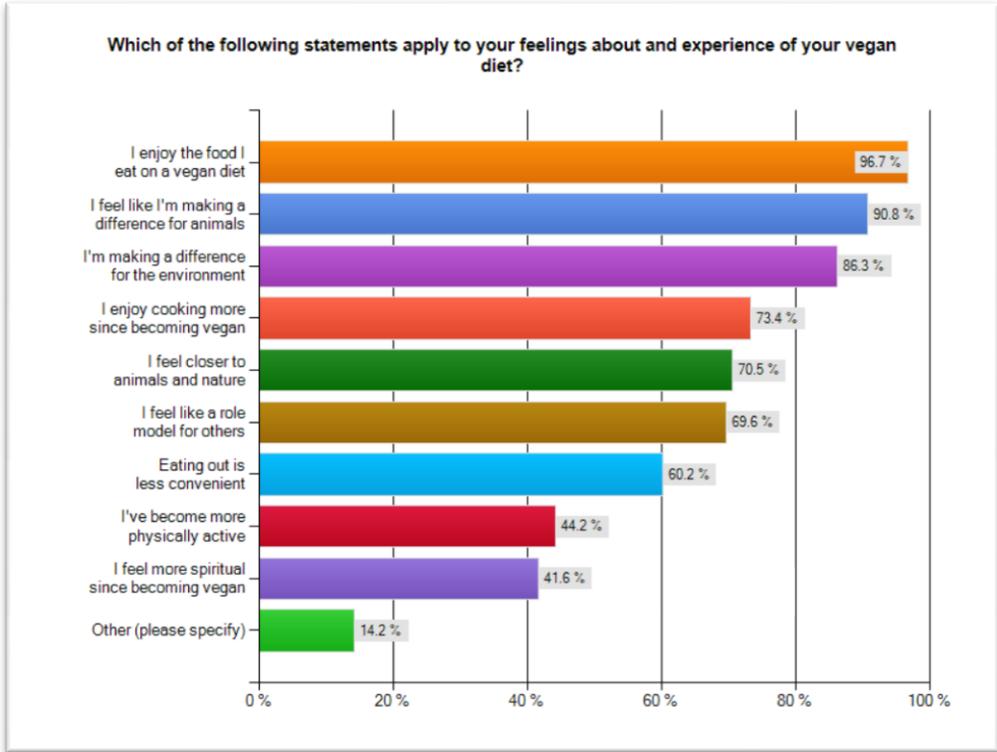


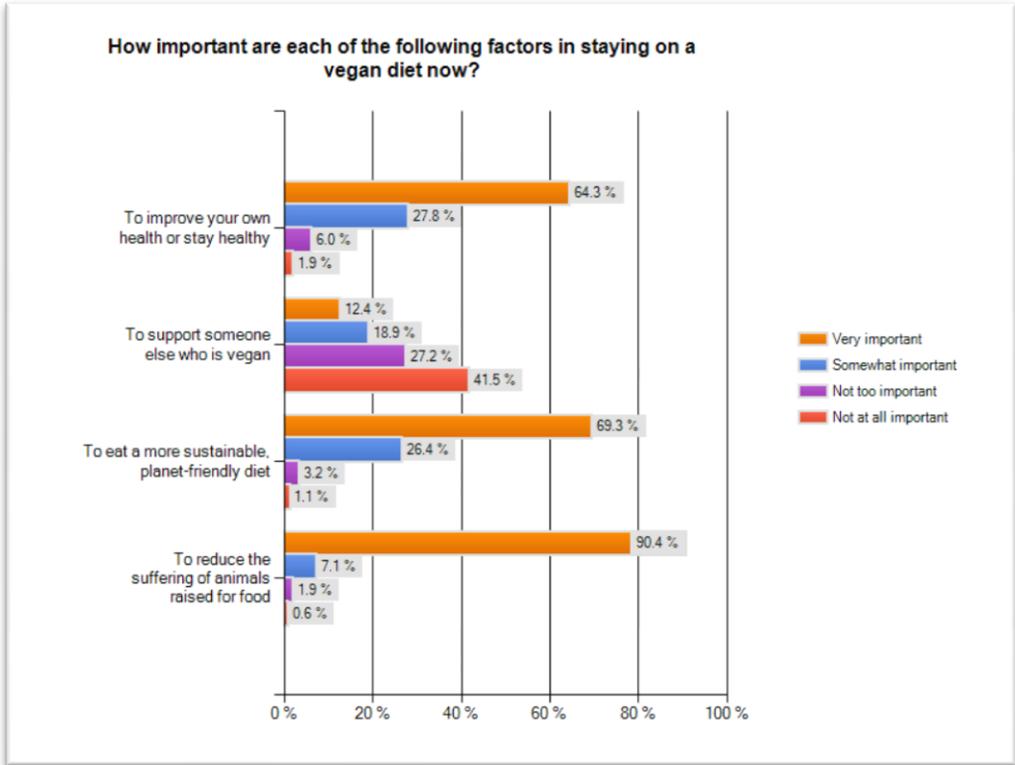
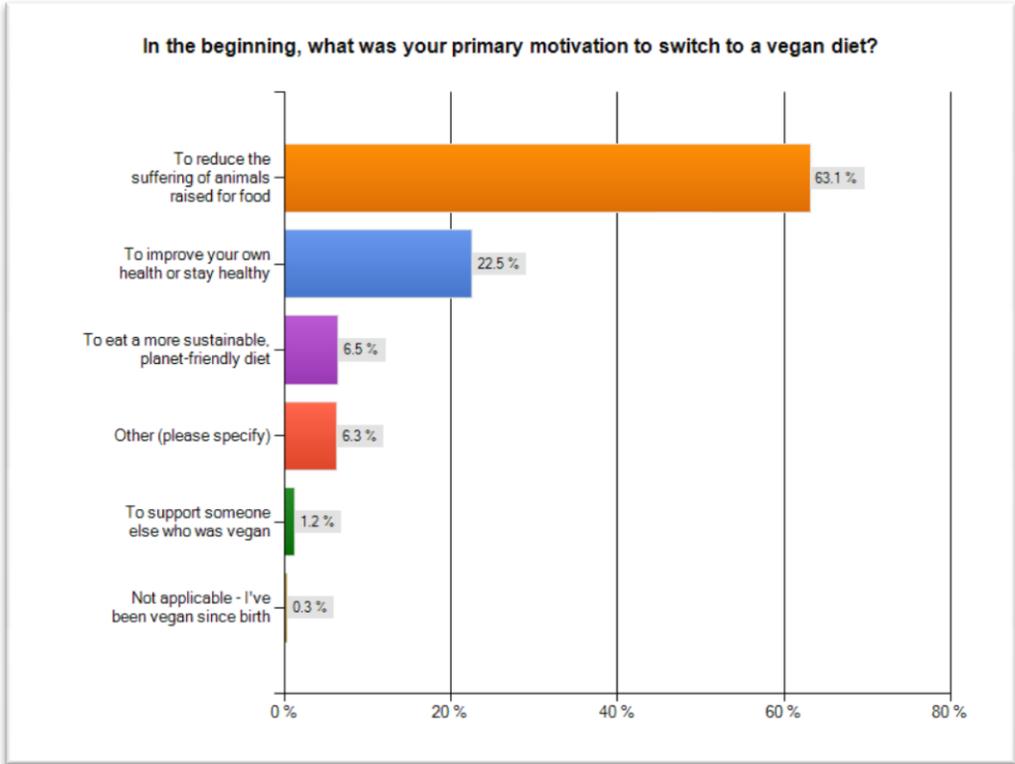
**When you first became vegan, how much effort did it take to transition to a 100% plant-based diet?**



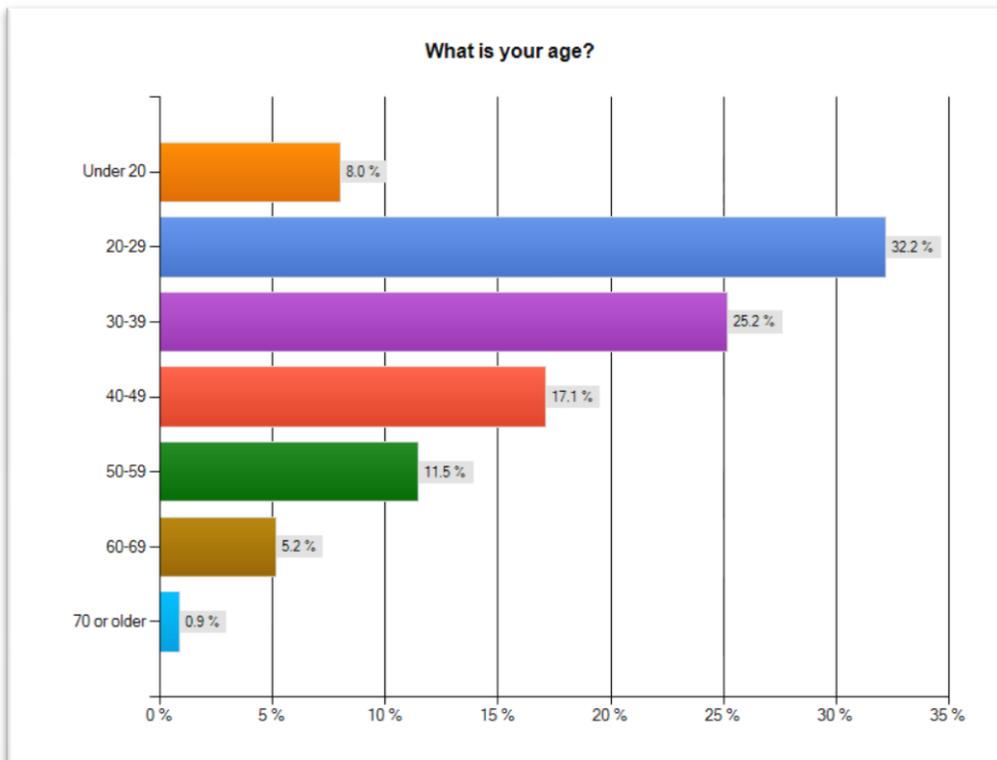
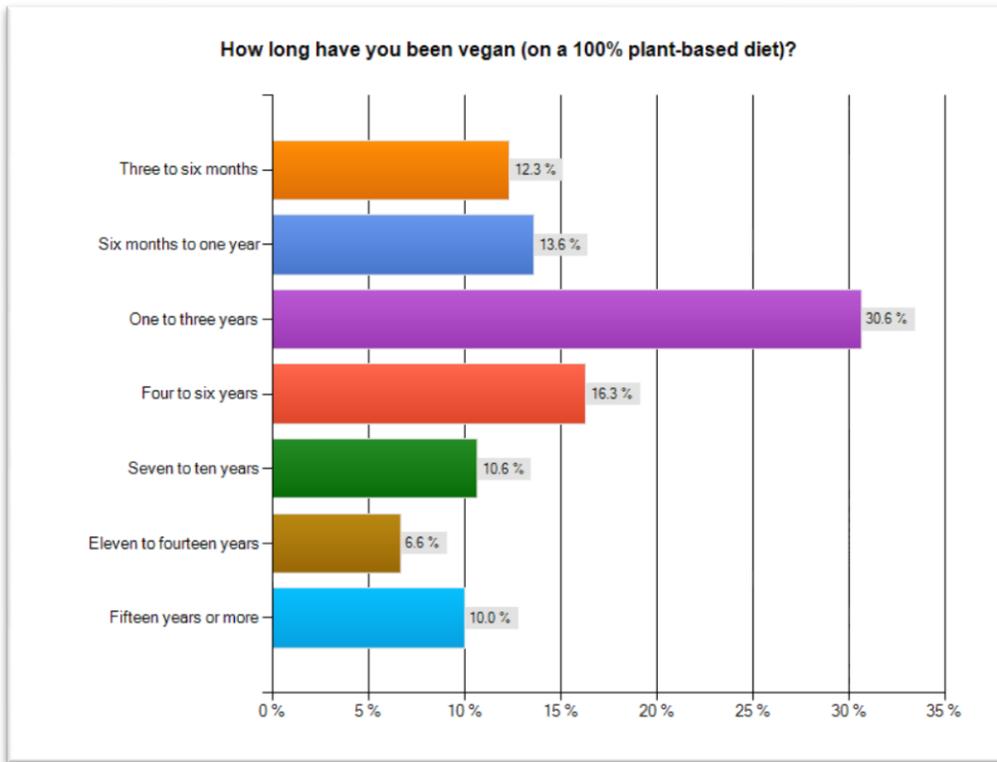
**Now, how much effort does it take to stay on a vegan diet?**

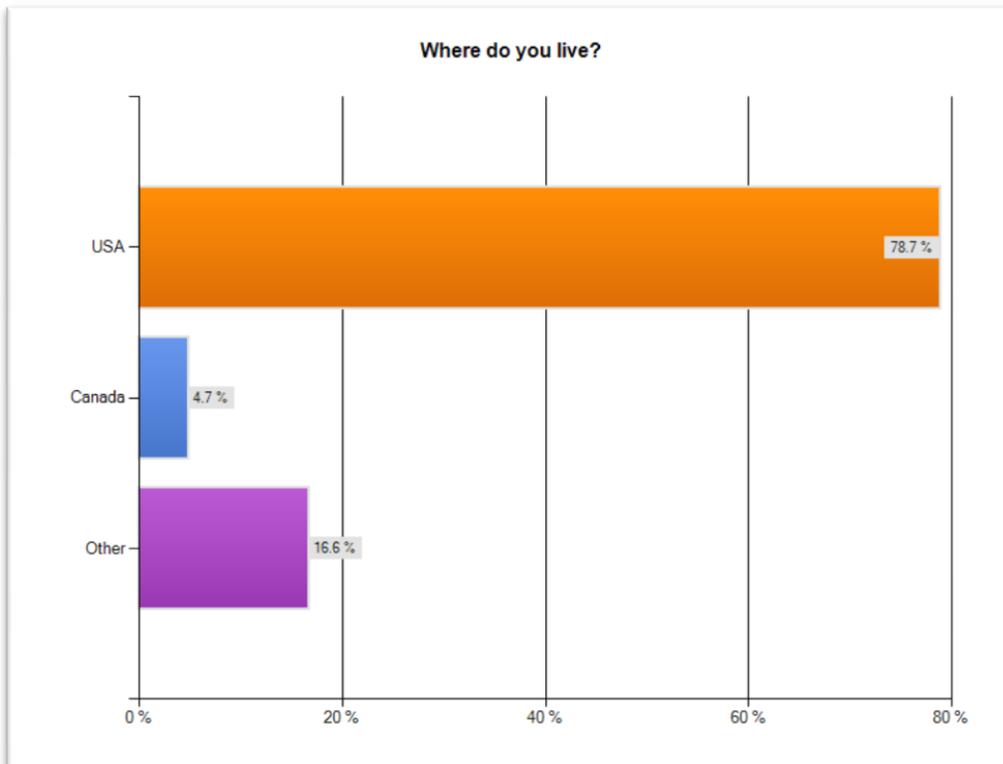
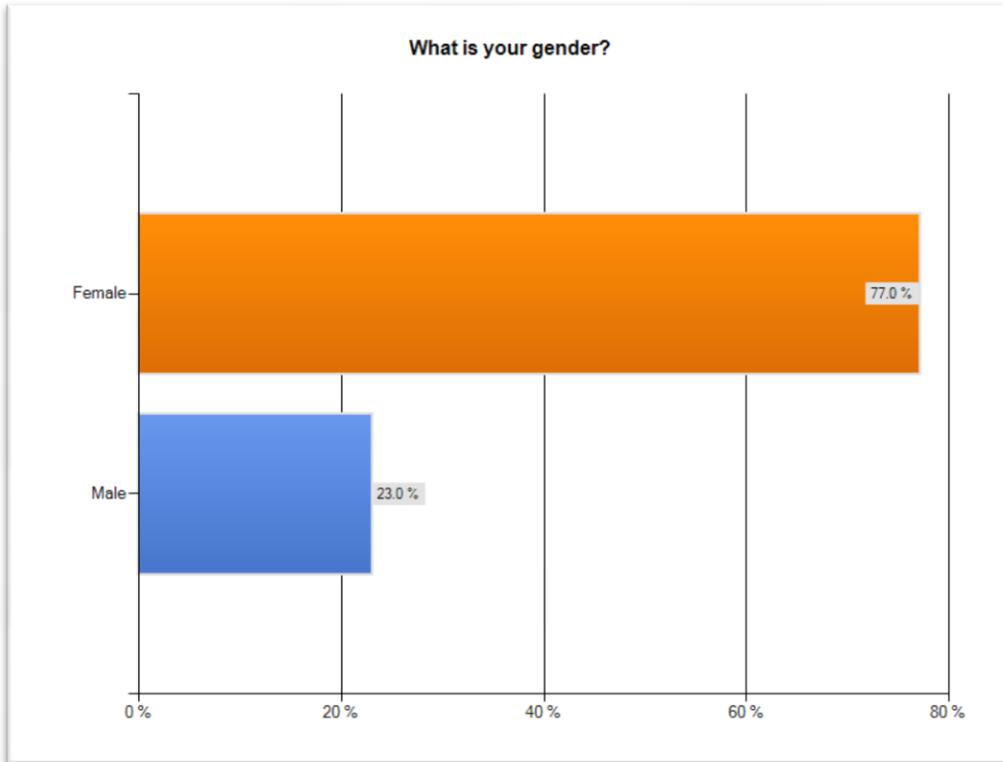






## PORTRAIT OF RESPONDENTS





Other locations include Australia (100 respondents), United Kingdom (85), Netherlands (29), and Germany (11).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Janice Stanger, Ph.D.](#) is a nutrition expert, author, educator, and speaker. Her mission in writing the book [The Perfect Formula Diet](#) is to help people, animals, and the planet through providing solid, yet little-known, information on [whole foods, plant-based diets](#). She is in her sixteenth year of critically analyzing scientific studies on [nutrition](#), [weight loss](#), [environmental toxins](#), and [health](#).

Janice has a Ph.D. in Human Development and Aging from University of California, San Francisco – one of the country’s leading health sciences campuses. She is certified in plant-based nutrition through the T Colin Campbell Foundation and eCornell. She also has an M.B.A. from University of California, Berkeley.

Janice has been on a 100% plant-based diet since 2000 and loves the way she eats. She experiences a whole foods, plant-based diet as the key to trim weight, vigorous health, all-day energy, and happiness every time she eats.

You can contact Janice through the contact submission form at her site <http://perfectformuladiet.com>, where she frequently blogs on the latest research and leading edge thinking on plant-based nutrition.